

January-February 2006

Douglas Repetto's Slowscan Soundwave (III)

Anne Swartz



Douglas Repetto, Slowscan Soundwave (III). Installation view. Image courtesy of artist.

A knowledgeable friend pointed me to Location One, a singularly engaging, idealistic and enchanting SoHo space any art lover must experience, no matter the exhibition. On view from October 11 through November 26, 2005, is a single exhibition consisting of a large installation in the main gallery, Slowscan Soundwave (III), and several sound pieces in the smaller gallery, loosely titled "The Telaesthetic Finger." Heather Wagner, who curated the exhibition focusing on sound art also has a piece on display. I focused my visit on the interactive installation in the main gallery because it was so visually engaging.

According to its mission statement, Location One is dedicated to acting as a "Catalyst for Content and Convergence," inviting artists to explore the relationships between art and technology, in process and product. The mission of this idealistic space is lofty and the work currently on view lives up to its high standards. In addition to its exhibition program, it supports an extensive performance program, a social forum, and a dedicated, active international residency program.

Slowscan Soundwave (III) by New York-based Douglas Repetto is a gorgeous and oft-fascinating mix of sound, ethereal forms and light, combined to create delicate images. The artist has suspended five fifteen-foot groups of Mylar sheets in parallel arrangements from the ceiling, as well as hanging two

long curves of Mylar from the walls. Then, in two corners and on one column, the artist has attached two sound-activated devices to the Mylar apparatuses by a series of twine connections. On the gallery floor in three locations, there is a microphone at the bottom of a Mylar cone collecting the sounds that start this Rube Goldberg-like contraption going.

Ambient sound activates the Mylar through a series of pulleys—the louder the sound, the more movement of the plastic. The installation changes according to the amount of sound in the gallery, depending upon talking, movements and the auditory contributions of the street, which are plentiful, given the gallery's location on Canal Street. One of the knowledgeable and articulate gallery staff pointed out that the installation becomes especially lively when people buy car stereo equipment at nearby outlets on Canal Street and turn onto Greene Street in front of the gallery to test them out.

This installation is the artist's third variation on his Slowscan Soundwave idea. The first one was smaller in scale and more sculptural. The second one was a temporary installation focusing on the rippling presence of Mylar overhead rather than on the images produced by light cast over and through them as they vibrated and undulated.

In this incarnation, gallery lighting aimed at the Mylar helps create shadow pictures from the diaphanous sheets as they move. The images created on the walls during the day (when I saw the installation) recall the shadow-play effects of bright sunshine cast through trees or reflecting off water. The artist's website has some images of the installation at night, which prompts very different visual effects. Where shadows and silhouettes might typically suggest darkness, the evanescence of the brightly lit clear plastic sheets promotes an airy feel to the gallery interior.

Repetto's installation is an absolutely enchanting and life-affirming experience, given that it requires interaction, either within the gallery walls or immediately beyond them, to activate the piece. The minimal simplicity of its appearance belies the beautiful shapes produced by it. Their ever-changing quality prompted many poetic allusions to nature, to synaesthetic occurrences, and to the banality of using such simple means to produce such appealing images. The ever-changing effect of the piece creates an infinite number of impressions, like life in its repetition with countless possibilities.

The installation recalled works by the major figures like James Turrell and Robert Irwin who came of age in the Light and Space Movement from the 1960s in California. The shadowy images of Repetto's work brought to mind the similarly affecting ones produced by Turrell in his Mendota Stoppages of 1969-70. Even though the Mylar sheets in Repetto's installation are transparent, they recalled the use of delicate scrims in Irwin's installation at Dia Chelsea, *Excursus: Homage to the square* of 1998-99 in its low-tech and mesmerizing appearance. Similarly, like Irwin's work, Repetto's installation creates a transcendent space through a minimum of means. The complexity of the conception in both is belied by the simplicity of the overall effect.

Repetto teaches at the Columbia University Computer Music Center. His past work has centered on creating dialogue for anyone interested in working with electricity. *Slowscan Soundwave (III)* uses nearly

inaudible and audible sound alongside visible and invisible phenomena for incredible effect. Hopefully, Repetto will continue to focus in this direction and places like Location One will offer remain ready to support for such work.